

Forgetting

by melusine

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Summary: Left sleepless by the nightmarish memories of her life in Vector, Terra finds that the more she remembers, the more she wants to start forgetting again. New Chapter 1.09.09

1. Chapter One

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****Chapter One****

Terra sat in one of the window seats of the Blackjack, looking out into the night sky. She hadn't slept at all that night as well as last night and the one previous to it. Being half esper, she could do with less, but she knew only a few hours every few nights would take its toll on her eventually. But the rest of the utterly exhausted was different from normal sleep: it was deep and dreamless. She felt her eyelids closing and quickly bit the tender skin between her thumb and her index finger, the pain jerking her body into wakefulness. If she slept now, she feared she would dream. . .and there was so much she didn't want to remember.

> Her muscles tensed as she heard someone descend the stairs into the room, a chill running down her spine. She calmed when she saw the reflection on the glass. Setzer. "You too?" she asked quietly.
 "Bad dreams," he answered, sounding distant. Shaking his head, he walked to one of the nearby tables and sat down. Like Terra, his worst scars were the ones that couldn't be seen. He placed his face in his hands and rubbed his fingers against his forehead, tracing the scars there. "Do you know any card games?" he asked, voice muffled. Setzer lifted his head and turned towards Terra.

> "No," her voice was barely above a whisper, choked with tears. The beginning of a sob followed it, causing her already trembling body to jerk slightly.
 "What's wrong?" Setzer asked, puzzled. He remembered when he had first seen her, laying unconscious on a bed in esper form. She had looked so frightened when she had awoken; her eyes wide and her breathing frantic. Although the others seemed used to her sometimes unusual mood swings, he hadn't known her as long.

> "Ever since they removed the slave crown, I've been remembering things," Terra took a deep breath and let it out slowly, shudderingly. "Things I wished would stay forgotten."
 The gambler nodded, reminded of his own memories of Darryl. His mind replayed the awful moment when he found his friend's remains in the wreckage; the look of horror on her face. "Bad memories have a way of sticking around," he said as he tried to banish the image from his brain. "The worse it is the more it wants to stay."

> "Like my entire existence," Terra murmured, then turned towards him, holding out her arms. "Look at me."
 Setzer stumbled for words, confused. "You look fine. . .a little sleepy, but fine."

> "Look closer," she insisted and Setzer cautiously complied.
 How could I have missed **this** before! the gambler thought, horrified at what he saw. Tracks from needles and shiny burn scars dotted her arms, intermixed with long, terrible scratchmarks. He looked up at Terra's face; her eyes were raw from tears.

> "They. . ." she started, avoiding his eyes. "He used me."
 "What did 'he' do to you?" Setzer asked gently.

> "Horrible things. . ." Terra trailed off, biting her lower lip. She opened her mouth, about to say more, then shut it again. Fresh tears trickled down her cheeks.
 "What?" he inquired further, already wishing he hadn't.

> "He wanted --" Terra started, hands reaching up to grasp the small vial of magicite that hung around a chain on her neck. "I was the only one --" Setzer reached out cautiously to put a hand on her shoulder as she began to cry. Terra shrank away from his touch, sobbing openly and helplessly. Hurt, Setzer drew his hand away, watching her curl up on the window seat. "Ever since they took the slave crown off, I've been remembering things," she looked back at him for a moment before burying her face in her hands. "I just want the slave crown back. . ." a sob wrenched her. "So I can start forgetting again." <p>

The wind howled outside, making raindrops clatter angrily against the windowpanes. The hazy halflight illuminated a young woman, no older than sixteen, curled up in a ball on her bed. The rich furnishings of the room marked her as either the wife or daughter of a noble, or the favorite of one. She was crying softly, her tears reddening her cheeks. A thin, unhealthy looking man with stringy blond hair was sitting at the foot of the bed, pulling on a pair of high heeled boots. Frowning, he looked up at the clock on the wall. "I know you're awake," he whispered.

> The girl squeezed her eyes shut tighter. She cringed as the man lay down beside her, resting his chin on her shoulder. "Terra," he murmured, brushing aside her hair to kiss her neck. "Cid will be cross if we are late."
 Terra swallowed hard, pushing back the sickness in her throat. "Then go, Kefka," she managed. "Cid doesn't want me to come along."

> "But I want you to come along," Kefka whispered insistently in her ear, voice as cold as icewater. "And you will do what I want." Terra could feel him smiling as he said this, the hairs on the back of her neck prickling up. "Whatever I want."

> "Please. . ." she whimpered as his lips brushed her cheek; his nails finding familiar scratches and reopening them. "I'll go, just stop. . .please stop."
 "As you wish," Kefka purred, kissing her before climbing out of her bed. "You are coming along, aren't you?" he asked, his tone indicating that it was more of a command than a request.

> "Yes, of course," Terra swallowed again, biting back pain and disgust. Shivering, she slid out of bed and pulled on a dress. Out of

the corner of her eye, she could see him watching her as she dressed, smiling slickly. Terra felt her skin goosepimpling again: something about those eyes. . .
> "Hurry," he told her, pleased at how obedient she was. Kefka's smile widened. "Terra dear, we mustn't be late."

> "I know, I know," Terra mumbled as she joined him at the door. In all her years under Kefka's "care," he had done everything in his power to break her, through every form of abuse. <p>

Fourteen years old, Terra sat on one of the gurneys in Cid's lab, watching as Kefka greeted the aging scientist. Although unyielding and abusive towards her, he was almost pathetically eager to please the old man. _Or maybe it's just an act, you never can tell with him._ Cid's adopted daughter, Celes, came in to sit beside her; picking idly at the bandage on her arm. Terra shivered, recalling that the girl had undergone her first infusion earlier that day. She looked back at Kefka, then at Celes, hoping for all the world that the pale, quiet girl wouldn't end up like the chaotic madman.

> Cid sighed as Kefka plucked the lab coat from his body and put it on, laughing at the sight of his thin hands and wrists poking out through the ends of the sleeves. "It's been a long time, hasn't it, Papa?" Kefka smiled charmingly at him, using an old petname. "So many infusions and still not perfect yet, at least in the eyes of his excellency Gestahl." The brightly dressed man shrugged off the coat and handed it back to the scientist before removing his long tunic and sitting down on the examining table.
> _He isn't too much different from when they found him, at least in appearance,_ Cid thought as he looked at Kefka. The emaciated street child had grown into a tall man with a ravaged, addict's body. With his painted face and slightly feminine features, Kefka reminded the scientist of some bizarre, expensive china doll: the Emperor's toy.

> "So what's on the menu for today?" Kefka asked as Cid pressed a stethoscope to his bony back, listening to his heart and lungs. "Lightening? Ice? Wind? Recovery? Defense? Biological? Fire?" he licked his lips and giggled. "Oh please tell me it's fire, Papa!"
> "You'll find out soon enough," Cid told him as he put the stethoscope away and took out a light and shone it in Kefka's eyes, noticing that his pupils now dilated into narrow, vertical slits. With every infusion, the younger man appeared to become less human and less sane. Yet, he appeared to still be in excellent condition for whatever he was, but how much longer that would last was uncertain at best. Noticing that his subject was starting to wince, Cid took the light away and bustled over to his lab table to get the Magicite solution for the infusion.

> Celes yawned, resting her head against Terra's shoulder. Although she had never had an infusion herself, Terra knew the effects they had on the human body. "Are you okay?" she asked Celes, shifting her position slightly.
> "Fine," Celes said sleepily, looking up at her with half-lidded eyes. "But it hurts. . .I don't know how Kefka can stand it."

> "So how's Terra?" Cid asked as he selected a place on one of Kefka's needle-marked forearms and swabbed a bit of alcohol onto it.
> "A bit sick lately," Kefka smiled slyly. "But she's putting on weight."

> Offhandedly, the scientist looked over at the girl: her limbs were still thin as sticks and coltish with youth, but there was a swelling, a slight roundish bulge, at her middle. Her eyes, too old for her face, met his; hands folding over her stomach. A cold sweat beading his brow, Cid turned back to Kefka. "She's only a child," he managed, voice flat from shock.
> The mask face regarded him in

turn, the once-sly smile now enigmatic, teasing. Cid felt his gaze drawn to that smile; watching the black rosebud of a mouth open to reveal teeth sharper than any human's should be. "So she is, Papa," Kefka said dryly, knowing that his reply would infuriate the scientist. He enjoyed testing his limits around people, seeing how far they would let him go before they would finally snap. Cackling, he lifted up one of his arms, the remaining alcohol a bright spot on the forearm. "Fill 'er up?"

> "Certainly," Cid said through gritted teeth as he plunged the needle into Kefka's arm, harder and deeper than was necessary, then pushed in on the stopper. He heard him hiss as he did so, his eyes dilating sharply from the sudden pain. For a moment, Cid was reminded of the first infusion: the young boy lying asleep on the table; the injection site looking bruised and inflamed, seeping through the bandage. The bruised look faded after a few days, but the mental scars remained and festered over twenty years, further infected by succeeding treatments. It was a vicious cycle; day by day, year by year.
 "That _ hurt_, Cid," Kefka snapped, a slight whine in his voice. After removing the syringe himself, he angrily tugged on his tunic and slid off the table; Terra awkwardly getting off of the gurney as he did so. He grabbed her by one arm, fingers closing tight over a bracelet of bruises on her upper arm, and jerked her into motion, forcing her to walk at his own quick pace out of the lab or be dragged. She stumbled behind him, trying her best to keep up, before disappearing down the hall out of Cid's view.

"Almost. . ." Cid urged, bringing Terra out of her fog of pain and anesthesia. The last few months had passed so uneventfully that, except for her growing belly, she could have forgotten that the child was even there. At her right, General Leo clasped her hand, his grip strong and reassuring. The man had raised Terra from infancy until she was ten years old, at which point the Emperor decided that the young magic user should be trained by his toy sorcerer.

> "Shouldn't the father be here?" a nurse, a new hiring from two months previous, asked, brow wrinkled with concern. Wordlessly, Cid looked to General Leo, who squeezed Terra's hand. The girl could see the outline of Kefka pacing outside the door, lean and dangerous. He reminded her of something predatory: at home when prowling the Veldt or gliding through the underbrush; a cat or serpent.
 Terra tensed through another contraction, forcing herself to push against the life that was tearing to break free; the strain stretching her body and opening newer wounds. She watched with detached interest at the spreading blotch of red staining the white fabric over her left breast where Kefka had bit her the day before.

> The child twisted and kicked; insistent and impatient. A chill ran down her spine, the full reality of what was happening impacting with sickening force. She gritted her teeth as instinct took over, working to finish the birthing without her conscious consent.
 A thin, almost angry cry pierced the room, breaking the near total silence. Terra felt as if time had stopped; as if she was a witness to a crime. She was suddenly keenly aware of the spaces between each heartbeat, every split-second death before her heart squeezed her back into life again. She watched in horror as the prowling shape outside the door stopped, alerted by the sound of the child's crying.

> "Congratulations," the nurse chirped brightly as she pressed a wrapped and squirming bundle into Terra's numb arms. "He's a beautiful baby. . .you should be proud."
 Terra said nothing, her eyes trained on the door. She felt her blood chill as the doorknob slowly turned, the sound of Kefka's nails scrabbling against the

metal a sharp staccato. She clutched her son close, trying to hide him with her body. Pale, poisoned light oozed through the opening door, spreading across the floor like a bloodstain as Kefka entered the room; the click of his heels a gunshot sound.

> He approached her without words, standing beside her without touching; a hideous mockery of a loving marriage. A hush had fallen over the room, broken only by the infant's whimpering as he started to cry, tired of being crushed up against his frightened mother, her frenzied heartbeat offering no comfort to him.
 "Well?" Kefka asked, placing a hand on Terra's shoulder and gripping it, letting the nails prick her skin ever so slightly. He smiled at General Leo as the man put his hand to the hilt of his sword, contented that her father was there to see what he had done to her. Terra looked up at Kefka, her eyes narrowing. She held the same look in her eyes as a mother mouse he had once found in the dungeon: she had bitten him keep him away from her young, only to watch helplessly as he ground them into the floor with his boots. He felt her tense as he reached around her to flick aside the blanket that swaddled the baby, her skin cool with sweat. "Ah. . a son."

> "What are you going to name him?" the nurse asked them, her smile and cheerful tone fake and forced. Births were supposed to be happy occasions; they weren't supposed to feel like the scene of some unspeakable crime. She bit her lip, worried for the girl and her child.
 "Atma," Kefka replied, testing the name on his tongue. The sorcerer smiled. "Yes. . .Atma," he repeated and the black smile glistened with sharp white teeth. "A lovely name, wouldn't you agree, Terra?"

> Terra stared wide-eyed at him, the color draining from her face. Numbly, she looked down at her son; at his small, red face. There was nothing more innocent than a newborn child: there was no villainy, no evil, no taint that could harm him. So he named him Atma, Terra shivered as Kefka's true intentions became horrifyingly clear. _He named him after a beast. I didn't give birth to his son. . .I gave birth to a weapon._

2. Chapter Two

****Forgetting****

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****Chapter Two****

Frost curled on the edges of Terra's barred windows, chilly air seeping beneath the panes along with pale moonlight. The young woman was rocking her son, his tiny fists gripping the fabric of her blouse; his drowsy face framed by pale blond curls. She jerked at the sound of a key rattling in the lock, unconsciously gathering Atma closer to her body; hunching over to shield him from harm. "You're back," she murmured.

> Kefka regarded her coldly as he shut the door behind him, his mouth set into a firm line. Six months had passed since the birth of his son; six months without even the tiniest glimmering of magic, of esper blood. He had seen how strong of mage Terra had been as an infant. She nearly burned down the coach they had carried her away in. He had hoped Atma would be capable of the same. "A failed experiment," he whispered to himself, wincing in annoyance as he saw Terra's back stiffen.
 "He's perfect," Terra's tone was tight, blindly defensive.

> "And still awake," Kefka replied as he locked the door, his dry

tone concealing his annoyance. "Why is he still awake, Terra?"
The young woman said nothing, staring past him as if she were studying the grain of the wooden door; her face unnervingly placid. The sorcerer smiled faintly as he looked back at her, noticing the soft, yet steady patting of Terra's hand against Atma's diapered bottom; jarring the infant into wakefulness. _So that's her plan, _Kefka thought as he removed his gloves, his crimson nails glinting in the moonlight. Earlier, he had allowed her peace from his "affections" if Atma was awake and needed tending to, the sound of his son's crying an unwanted distraction. "I asked you a question."

> Terra's back tensed further, yet she still stared calmly past him. Minutes passed without either speaking; the only sounds the even patting of Terra's hand and the ticking of the clock. The sounds grated upon Kefka's magicite-heightened senses, his fingers twitching into fists; his smile turning into an angry grimace. "Terra?" he murmured smoothly as he approached her, noticing that her eyes lost their distant quality at the sound of his voice. The sorcerer placed his hands on her shoulders and leaned close to her; his lips against her ear. "Why do you insist on ignoring me?" To his delight, he could feel Terra quivering with fear, her heart racing. She was aware of her breathing, of the weight of her child in her arms, of Kefka's fingertips sliding against her skin in a pale imitation of a lover's caress. She was aware of the heat of his body and the bed that stood beneath the window, behind them both, its rumpled eiderdown offering her a perversely familiar routine. And she was aware of the door before her, offering another, more dangerous option. "He can't sleep," she finally whispered and her patting increased its desperate tempo. "It's been hours. . .I've fed him, rocked him, changed him. . .he can't sleep." Terra took a deep breath, trying to calm herself.
In a childhood that felt too far away for comfort, Terra had been both entertained and terrified by General Leo's tales of sprites and witches, imps and faes, of ghosts and the demons that hid in the dark spaces beneath beds and behind closed doors. In those days, a candle by the bedside had been enough to protect her, no one had told her that these childhood monsters would someday become real: that they would no longer be content with sleeping in the shadows and would come in to lie beside you; that they were beautiful. . .and they knew when you lied.

> "Is that so? Pity," the sorcerer murmured. "Such a pretty little pity, such a shame. . . ." his fingers clenched against her shoulders, his nails digging into her clammy skin. "What game were you playing, Terra?"
Late at night, she and Celes used to creep from their rooms and explore the castle together, their small hands clasped together in the darkness. Things were different at night: full of faces never seen in daylight, such as the midnight watch, and, in the chill and antiseptic lab, a pale man picking among the vials of magicite. She had learned later that it was because the biological transfusions had temporarily made his skin too sensitive to bear even the weakest sunlight. Then, he had been an empty terror, as unreal as any of Leo's stories. Then, it had been a game to find him. . .she remembered hearing Celes's intake of breath as he turned to look at them, his dark eyes fixing on Terra's, and how they had ran. . .

> ". . .Terra darling, you're not funny anymore."
. . . Ran until they thought their lungs would burst, laughing while their hearts pounded in their chests. She remembered lying in bed, shivering as adrenaline flowed as electric as magicite through her veins; the thrill of the prey escaping the hunter. She remembered the feeling in her chest, years later, when she was taken from Leo and pressed into the service of Kefka. . .and looking back into the general's face as

the sorcerer led her away into a world where nothing could protect her.

> "Despite what you may think, my patience is limited. I am not going to leave and I am not going to let you sit there rocking him all night. Whatever are you planning? Do you mean to turn me over to the Emperor? To Leo? To Cid? Or are you planning to escape?"
 Terra shook her head, her patting becoming erratic as Kefka's nails sank deeper into her skin. "No, none of those," she whispered, forcing herself to keep her voice from trembling.

> "Oh? But what if you were? Let's play a little game, Terra. . .you do like games, don't you?" Kefka chuckled softly. "Say that you did get out -- with Atma, of course, I doubt you would leave him here -- what use is telling Cid and Leo? They know, my darling, and they haven't said anything yet. And perhaps you could tell that fat little nurse, I'm sure she would believe you that something was 'wrong'. . .but why would she hold any sway with his excellency Gestahl? The same goes for the night watch, Terra, drunkards all. But let us forget them. . .let's say that you went to Emperor Gestahl. Do you think that he would believe you?"

> Another weak head shake.
 "Of course not," the sorcerer smiled, kissing Terra on the ear. "Do you think he would suspect his favorite of such atrocities? But what if he did: whatever could he do? There are a multitude of options: he could jail me, he could expel me, or he could even order me executed. . .however, each of these has a vital flaw. The jailing would be simple, but it would keep me out of his sight.. .the Emperor is a vain man and he sees me as proof of his genius. . .the recreating of the Mage Knights was his idea. And the execution is also a foul plan: it would take them too long to safely, or even unsafely, bring another soldier to my level. Or perhaps he could have me turned out into the streets of Vector. You would like that, wouldn't you? Do you think that I would be a poor, pampered little nobleman shivering on the cold streets? You forget that I was born there, Terra, I know how to survive. . .and I would be welcomed there. . .they need me: I'm their proof that they can move up in the world."

> Silence.
 "But I'm focusing too much on myself, aren't I? You could have escaped without telling anyone: you do believe yourself as brave as that frosty little friend of yours, however untruthful that may be. You could have broken the window and slipped out under the cover of darkness, thinking that the blankets would make for a long enough ladder. . .they won't. But, silly me: breaking the glass would make noise and the night watch would surely see you and your makeshift ladder -- that wouldn't work even if there were enough blankets! And I'm not taking into account how smart you think you are: you wouldn't do that, no, not at all, you would steal the keys from me as I slept, wouldn't you -- I have become foolishly daring as of late, haven't I. . .sleeping in your bed when mine would do just as well? Say you tried to escape that way: if the watch didn't catch you, where could you go? Do you think anyone would welcome the Imperial Witch and her magicless little boy, a boy she claimed to be the bastard son of Kefka Palazzo? At best, they would leave you outside their doorstep to freeze and starve. . .at worst, they would turn you back over to the Emperor. And back to me, my dear, you will see that I always win."

> Terra nodded numbly. "I know. . .I'm sorry."
 "Good girl," Kefka purred, standing up. "Now, shall we put this little matter to bed?"

> ". . .Let me put Atma in his cradle first. . ." she mumbled, forcing her shaking body to stand and face him. The sorcerer put his hands to his face with an air of shocked amusement. "My dear,

whatever are you thinking? Did you think that --? Oh my. . .tsk tsk. . .what naughty thoughts! You're right, though," he chuckled. "Of course, we mustn't forget the baby. . .hand him to me."
 "What?" Terra stammered, taking a step backwards.

> "Hand him to me," the amused tone left Kefka's voice. "The boy. . . my son. . .Atma. What don't you understand?"
 "Nothing -- I, I mean -- why?"

> "Why? I simply want to hold him, he is my child too, after all."
 Terra took another step backwards. Something felt wrong. . .severely wrong. Ever since Atma had been born, the sorcerer had taken little interest in the infant, even less when it became apparent that he possessed no magical ability. Six months had passed, and he hadn't even asked to hold his son. . .never spoke to him. . .no interest. . .Why now? An icy feeling settled shuddered down her spine as she took another halting step backwards, and then another, and another until her back was pressed against the door. No escape.

> "You're being ridiculous," Kefka stepped forward and plucked the boy from her arms.

> A slow, sick feeling settled in the young woman's stomach, her arms falling limp at her sides. Mouth dry, she clenched her jaw and waited for what he would say next. Numbly, she watched as the sorcerer gathered his son to his chest, humming snatches of an old lullaby.
 "You could try to relax," Kefka murmured, gently rocking the infant. "Look, Atma's falling asleep." He cocked his head, amused, waiting for her reply. Seeing the muscles move in Terra's neck as she clenched her jaw tighter, he continued. "It has been a long time since I last held a child, but I assure you I haven't forgotten how to. Why, last time, darling, it was you." Another pause, another silence. "They handed you to me while they went to finish off your father. . .except that they didn't kill him, no, a dead Esper is only useful as long as the magicite lasts, a living one can be bled and bled again. Did you know about that? How, when wounded close to the source, their blood crystallizes? It makes a fine staunch for their wounds, but an even finer drug."

> Terra tensed her legs; if she could get him off guard, she could tear the key from his belt, retrieve her son, and escape. Kefka had said that she had no chance. . .but she had to try, to hope; hope and Atma were all she had left. And Kefka was planning something. . .and the results were never pleasant.
 "When they handed you to me -- imagine, I was only a little older then you are now -- you were crying. So I sang to you, I really didn't know what to do at the time. I only knew one song, a simple lullaby, but I sang to you. And I hated you, I would have killed you if the Emperor hadn't wanted you alive," he smiled, hearing a catch in Terra's breathing. "But every time I walked by your cradle, I wanted to hurt you. . .just to see how you would bleed; how Esper you were. A pity our little Atma --"

> "Give him back," Terra managed, her tongue sticking in her dry mouth. She looked up at him, her eyes feral, hating, her lips drawn up to show her teeth. "Give him back now."

> "Oh?" Kefka bent to kiss Atma on the forehead. Straightening up, he smiled winningly at Terra, his teeth bright as knives. Calmly, he brushed his hair out of his eyes, then let his hand down hard on the baby's neck; driving his nails through the tender skin of his throat.
 Terra made a weak moaning sound, her legs giving way as Kefka tore his nails from the wound. For a second, time ceased. . .shock closing fast. Squeezing her eyes shut, Terra tried to block out the sickly gurgling of her dying son and the bright jet of blood that splattered across the sorcerer's face.

> Kefka opened his eyes, drops of crystallized magicite clinging to the ends of his eyelashes and a larger patch drying on his cheek and jaw. Looking down at Atma's limp body, he couldn't help but laugh: it was all too absurd! "Terra dear, did you ever imagine?"
 "No," Terra replied, sounding hollow and distant. "I didn't."
> "Hmmm? You didn't? Fancy that," he chuckled again. "It's almost funny. . . it is funny. Look, darling, do you think he'll become magicite once he's bled white? He's almost through - open your eyes - see?"
 The young woman silently complied, trying to keep her vision blurry and unfocused. She didn't want to look, didn't want to see. . . Kefka made a warning sound and she blinked, her eyes first focusing on the sorcerer's blood-spattered face, then lower, onto the pitiful bundle he held in his arms. It was senseless, she knew; to do anything else. _He didn't even. . .he killed Atma. All I have to do is watch._ Terra swallowed thickly; she didn't want to give him the pleasure of seeing her be sick or of seeing her cry.
> The infant's body was drawing in on itself, crystallizing unevenly at the crook of Kefka's arm. He looked at it with disinterest; it was no longer as fascinating as it had once been when it had bled crystals or had struggled weakly against his hands. He sniffed in contempt. Terra sat at his feet, her breathing uneven and shuddering, her face expressionless. Pathetic. Bored, he scratched at the patch of magicite on his cheek, the fragile crystals chipping off easily and breaking apart on the hard floor.
> Terra drew her knees up to her chest and squeezed her eyes shut, her hands pausing briefly on her shins before she clasped them to her ears. She pressed her face close to her knees. She didn't need to hear the magicite breaking to know that it had been dropped or thrown, didn't need to see the look of depraved fascination on Kefka's face as his son tumbled, shattering and skidding, accross the metal floor and thin rugs. Seconds later, something sharp hit her in the leg and the faint sound of laughter filled her ears. She could feel Kefka crouch down beside her; a hand searching for her chin to lift it so that he could kiss her mouth. The night wasn't over yet.
<p>

to be continued

3. Chapter Three

Author's Note: I'm currently replaying Final Fantasy 6 so that I can give this fic the ending it has long since deserved. I can't thank those who have followed and enjoyed this fic enough, and I apologize for the previously HUGE gaps in updates! Here's a little update before the big one~

Out of her room and into one of the narrow halls, Terra could see that it was barely morning. The night watch was stumbling off to bed, some leaning against one another and reeking of alcohol. Even staggering like they were, they made great effort not to brush against her as they passed. It was safer that way, they felt, not to admit that they had even seen her in Kefka's presence, let alone touched her even to steady her walking or let arm brush against arm in a crowded hallway. She had been led to Cid's laboratory from the same room since she was a child, the steps easy and familiar. Sometimes, she had walked there with Leo, other times with Celes, but now it was only with Kefka, who never left her alone for longer than

he could help it. Some glimmering of rumor had reached the Emperor's ear and, alone, the sorcerer feared that she would confirm it; confirm the destroyed records of a birth, of a death, confirm how she had gotten those burns and bruises, confirm everything. She wouldn't. She was afraid of being taught another spell. So they continued walking.

In the narrow hallways, she could feel like she was alone, walking behind Kefka instead of beside him; she could close her eyes and just focus on following the clicking footsteps. Sometimes he would talk to her, his voice soft and laced with menace when there was no one else to hear and bright, almost cheerful when someone was. It didn't matter if she answered, then. It was just important if she listened. In front of her, Kefka was walking in his usual, curious manner, his back and hips holding a slight, almost feminine, serpentine sway. She focused on the way the fabric along his back shifted as he moved, the way his hair -- free of the feathers, beads, and quills that usually decorated it -- slid against his shoulderblades. She didn't look at his hands, even though the nailtips that had been chipped at Atma's death had long since been pared away. Terra had long since learned to watch his movements, to know when he would turn or stop. Pain was never very far from disobedience.

Once, she would have never thought that she would have to divide those she loved, those she cared about, into public or private deaths; how easy they would be to lose, how much and by how many they would be missed. Each morning, she awoke to the roster. There was something strangely comforting about it, to wake up and know that all of those she couldn't protect would survive. Atma was too private, she realized, someone only a handful of people would ever know about. She knew that she hovered between a public and private death. But, Leo was public. Celes was public. Cid was public. She took comfort in that.

Once, she had been asked if she loved Kefka. The rumors were everywhere among the soldiers, some more kind than others. The beery leers from the balconies and from the marching ranks of perfect soldiers. 'You have to like it,' their eyes would say. 'There can be nothing else. Come, look how pretty you both are. Did the Emperor plan this?' Men and women marching, with their close cropped hair and expressionless faces, it was nearly impossible to tell one from the other. 'The Emperor is a genius. He planned this all along.' Rank after rank of perfectly regimented denial.

Kefka paused briefly, then continued down the second of two branching tunnels. The walls were slick and shiny with moisture, scabrous rust turning the walls to a patchwork of muted grey and a dull, bloody red. These were among the least-used areas of Vector castle, leading to all but abandoned outside storage rooms and hangars for scrapped IAF crafts. There was a single guard posted at the door to the outside, placed there to redirect all who had gotten lost and found themselves there. An easy post, he was sure. He could hear the soft sound of Terra walking behind him, she hadn't spoken a word since they had left her bedroom. He frowned. She had changed, hardly sleeping, eating little. She was so obedient now, silent and pliable. The sorcerer wondered if the device was still necessary and if disobedience was still an issue.

The device, something that Ghestahl had named the Slave Crown -- though Kefka doubted that he even remembered issuing the project now,

it was so long ago -- was made by the late Dr. Eileen Palazzo to control the espers. It had never been used and instead sat in a dusty box in what had been her old room, now Kefka's. The scientist had despised the idea of the device, arguing that she had no knowing that it would even work on the minds of a true esper, it having been built using specifications from dissections and experiments conducted prior to the War of the Magi. Similar devices had halted the captured espers in place, their horns, claws, and magic capable of being turned against them with a simple command. So it had to work, Kefka was sure of it. His mother would never lie to him. He could feel the slender crown, concealed in a pack, tapping against his hip as he walked. Soon now, soon.

End
file.